

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF AMPHIUMA, THE SO-CALLED
CONGO SNAKE, IN VIRGINIA.

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The "Congo snake" (*Amphiura means* Garden), according to Professor Cope,¹ inhabits the austroriparian region, not being found west of Louisiana nor north of Arkansas in the Mississippi Valley. The northern limit of its distribution on the Atlantic coast is not stated by Cope, but Jordan² gives the range as extending from Arkansas to North Carolina and southward. The U. S. National Museum collection contains specimens from Indiana, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. From the last-named State there is a single specimen, taken at Tarboro, a town on Tar river, in Edgecombe county. This is the most eastern locality from which the species has been recorded as far as my information goes, with the exception of some examples from southeast Virginia, to which reference will now be made.

In October, 1892, while excavations were in progress for an electric railway between Old Point Comfort and Hampton, Virginia, the workmen unearthed six or eight specimens of *Amphiura* of various sizes, the largest about 20 inches long. One of these was sent to Washington for identification by my friend Capt. N. Raynor, of Hampton. This specimen is now in the U. S. National Museum (Cat. No. 19615). In April, 1897, Capt. Raynor forwarded two more specimens, each 20 inches long, from the same locality. These were sent alive in a small pail of water, and one was retained in an aquarium in the U. S. Fish Commission building, Washington, D. C., until October, 1897.

All of these animals were observed at a depth of 2 or 3 feet beneath the surface, some being below and some above the water level. They were not found in one particular spot, but inhabited an area a quarter of a mile in extent about 1½ miles from James river, comprising the lowest part of a tract of low farming land, where, during winter, water

¹ Batrachia of North America, 1889.

² Manual of the Vertebrates, 1890, 5th ed.

often remains on the surface, but which in summer is dry and covered with a growth of tall grass, with a few stunted oaks and pines. The excavations which brought the specimens to notice opened up various holes or paths, along which it appeared the animals passed.

This species is unknown to the people of Hampton and vicinity, and must be quite rare, as only the foregoing examples have ever been observed. Excavations through 4 or 5 miles of low land in the same section did not disclose any specimens of *Amphiuma*, although it appeared to be just as favorable for them as the limited area mentioned. Professional "ditchers" who have had much experience in cutting drains and ditches in the region about Hampton have never met with the species.

The locality in which these specimens were found is about 110 miles in an air line northeast of Tarboro. It seems probable that the species will in time be reported from such a favorable region as the Dismal Swamp, 30 miles south of Hampton, and from other suitable intermediate points.